

*Obituary Notice of Caspar Wister, M.D.**By Craig Biddle.**(Read before the American Philosophical Society, October 4, 1889.)*

CASPAR WISTER was born on the 15th day of September, A. D. 1818, at the old homestead in Germantown, built by his great-grandfather in 1744, and continuously occupied by the family from that date.

He was the first child of Charles Jones Wister, by his second wife, who was a Miss Sarah Whitesides.

His first school-days were passed at a school in Germantown, kept by Miss Rooker. This school, of course, he soon outgrew and was then sent to Bolmar's celebrated academy, at West Chester, where he laid the foundation for his subsequent familiarity with the modern languages. Subsequently being desirous of qualifying himself as a civil engineer, he was transferred to the school of Mr. John Gummere, then a member of our Society and a distinguished mathematician, residing at Burlington, N. J. The fame of both of these teachers yet lives in their well-known educational works—those of Mr. Bolmar being mainly confined to the teaching of the modern languages, while those of Mr. Gummere concerned the mathematics. His works on astronomy and surveying have held their own to the present day, in spite of the great competition they have met with from the works of subsequent teachers.

After graduating, he became desirous of putting into practical use the education he had received, and he determined to seek employment in some new and growing country, where as a civil engineer his services would be in request.

At that time, Texas presented, he thought, the opening which he sought. The Mexican government, as early as the year 1824, had passed colonization laws and held out inducements to citizens of the United States to settle within the limits of Texas, then one of its provinces. It soon thereafter became a point of attraction for settlers from all parts of our country. Their growing strength and steadfast adherence to republican principles aroused, however, the jealousy of the Mexican authorities, and in April, 1830, an arbitrary law was passed prohibiting any future immigrations of American settlers into Texas. The attempt to enforce this law, added to other arbitrary acts of the central government, threw Texas into revolt. In the attempt to suppress this revolt by force of arms, the Mexicans met with a crushing defeat at San Jacinto, where their army was routed by a very much inferior force, under General Houston, and Santa Anna, who called himself the Napoleon of the West, was taken prisoner. This battle secured the independence of Texas, which was subsequently recognized in 1837 by the United States.

General Houston was elected President of the new republic, and by his wise administration all further difficulties both with Mexico and the Indian

tribes were settled, and there was a fair prospect of annexation to the United States, for which he strenuously labored.

Unfortunately the President was elected for a term of but two years, under the constitutional provision, which likewise rendered him ineligible for an immediately succeeding term.

Houston, to the great regret of all, was obliged to retire, therefore, from the office until he would again be eligible, when he was reelected. But in this interval more violent counsels prevailed, and the difficulties both with Mexico and the Indians were renewed. It was at this time young Wister reached Texas, where he found there was a much greater demand for soldiers than civilians. General Houston possessed in a high degree, both physically and mentally, those traits which made him a great leader of men. His picturesque appearance, his adventurous life, and his utter fearlessness, joined to his integrity of purpose, created especially in the young an enthusiasm that was irresistible. Wister at once yielded to it and enlisted under his banner as a first sergeant, in a regiment of mounted rifles.

After serving out his term of enlistment he returned at the end of two years to Philadelphia. He found, however, that he had not as yet overcome his attachment to a life of wild adventure, and at the end of six months he returned to Texas, and, renewing his connection with the army, served another campaign against the Indians. When this was finished, he yielded to the solicitations of his family and returned to Philadelphia. Here he was induced to enter upon the study of medicine as a pupil of Dr. George B. Wood, whose name and fame as a physician are so well known to us. In March, 1846, he graduated from the medical department of the University of Pennsylvania, his thesis being on the "Origin and Progress of Medicine." On the 20th of July of the same year, he married Miss Lydia H. Simmons, and settled down to the practice of his profession. He soon fell into a good practice, and secured the unreserved confidence and warm attachment of his patients. He was esteemed by his fellows as an able, cautious and painstaking practitioner, always intent upon the welfare of his patients.

In 1848, he became a member of the College of Physicians in Philadelphia, and the same year was elected physician of the Widows' Asylum. In 1849 he became physician of the Shelter for Colored Orphans. In 1852 he was elected a member of the American Medical Association, and in 1855 was appointed its Treasurer and a member of its Publication Committee. On retiring from his position as Treasurer, in 1877, the following resolution was passed by the Association:

"At the Twenty-eighth Annual Meeting of the American Medical Association at Chicago, June 8, 1877, on motion of Dr. I. F. Hibberd, of Indiana :

"*Resolved*, That this Association, in view of the retirement from the office of Treasurer of the gentleman who, for twenty-two years, has discharged the responsible and laborious duties of that situation, desires in this manner to express its high appreciation

of and full satisfaction with the promptness and completeness with which Caspar Wister has discharged the incumbent obligations of its financial agent, for so many years, and hereby tender to him the sincerest thanks of the Association for such long and honorable service."

Being a warm personal friend of Gen. McClellan, he accepted an invitation from him to join his headquarters at Yorktown. He accompanied the army on its advance from that point and its subsequent movement to the James river, being present at all the battles during that period, known as the seven-days battles.

So varied a life would have tempted most men to indulge, perhaps, too freely in personal reminiscences. But nothing was more distasteful to Dr. Wister than in any way to bring his own personality into prominence. Although no man was less bashful, few men were so modest. His wonderful power of adapting himself to the society he happened to be in, was the only thing which would lead you to suppose that he must have had a very wide experience of men and things. If he was wanted he was always ready when called on, provided that he could not persuade his friends that they had much better select some one else.

It was this absence of self-appreciation, connected with the fact of easy pecuniary circumstances, which alone prevented his occupying a more distinguished position than he did. Certain it is, that he never occupied any position, the duties of which he did not fill to the entire acceptance of every one.

Nothing, perhaps, shows this more clearly than the recital of the various associations, incongruous to almost any one else, of which he was a member, and generally a leading member. He was a Manager of the House of Refuge and a Director of the Philadelphia Library, President of the Rittenhouse Club and of the Board of Inspectors of the County Prison, member of the Academy of Natural Sciences and President of the Fencing and Sparring Club, Director of the Philadelphia Savings Fund and a member of this Society since 1859. All of these in addition to the Medical Association already referred to.

His nature was essentially genial; his frank, manly, unreserved manner was typical of his character. He inspired confidence at once, and a further knowledge of his clear judgment and honest sincerity confirmed it. He had a keen sense of humor, and his conversation, as well as the occasional products of his pen, were full of it. It was to be regretted that he could not be induced to write oftener for publication. A pleasant, graceful article, entitled, "A Cruise Among the Windward Islands—The Log of the *Vega*," which appeared in *Lippincott's Magazine*, in 1883, is a fair sample of his literary taste and capacity.

Dr. Wister's robust frame and temperate habits gave every indication that he would live to an advanced age; unfortunately, however, while alighting from a street car at the Pennsylvania Railroad Depot, at Thirtieth and Market streets, a runaway horse dashed against him and threw him with great violence against an iron post. The blow was so severe as to

fracture his skull. He, however, did not lose for an instant his consciousness, but informed those surrounding him, that he was about to meet Dr. I. Hayes Agnew in consultation at the residence of a patient and to send there for him at once. By the most skillful treatment, aided by his wonderful physical vigor, he apparently recovered entirely. This was in August, 1879, and almost to the hour of his death, on December 20, 1888, he pursued his usual vocation. During the last year of his life, he underwent great sufferings, from which the skill of his physicians was unable to relieve him. How far the frightful shock to his system had sapped his vitality and caused this trouble, it is perhaps impossible accurately to determine. He was entirely conscious that his life hung by a thread and realized as a physician that his case was hopeless. He died, however, like a soldier at his post, with the most serene courage and self-possession.

His first wife having died in 1848, Dr. Wister was happily married a second time on June 26, 1854, to Miss Annie Lee Furness, who survives him, as well as his daughter by his first wife, Mrs. Clifford B. Russell.

*An Outline of the Philosophy of Evolution.*

*By E. D. Cope.*

*(Read before the American Philosophical Society, October 4, 1889.)*

Mental processes are divided into those of presentation and those of representation, or those of perception and those of ideation. A vast difference distinguishes the physiological action of these two forms of mentality. Sensuous perception is a more distinct, sometimes even a violent state of consciousness, while ideation is a much less distinct condition, although the range of its degrees of impressiveness in consciousness is very great. In a conflict between perception and ideation for the control of consciousness, the former can nearly always win, temporarily at least, in the healthy organism. But the impressiveness of perception is perhaps the cause of its remarkable transitory character. It is a fact of great importance that sensations cannot be exactly reproduced in memory, while ideas can be so reproduced. Sensations leave residua, it is true, which are the materials of ideation, but it is only ideas which memory preserves in their original form. It has been suggested \* that this result is due to a destruction of tissue caused by the greater energy of sensations; while ideation, less violent, is principally constructive, organizing brain molecules into

\* American Naturalist, 1886, p. 83.